

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/journalist-serving-150-day-jail-30-07-2012,43131.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Serbia

Inappropriate conviction

Presidential pardon for jailed freelance journalist

7 August 2012

Reporters Without Borders hails Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic's decision on 3 August to pardon **Laszlo Sas**, a 69-year-old freelance journalist who was jailed on 23 July for being unable to pay a fine of 150,000 dinars (1,200 euros) for insulting a far-right Hungarian politician (see below).

In a press release announcing the pardon, the president cited "freedom of opinion" and said it was "inappropriate for a journalist to be imprisoned for making his own opinion public."

"We are relieved for Sas, now that this 13-day nightmare is over for him," Reporters Without Borders said. "This case has highlighted the urgency of the need to decriminalize media offences in Serbia and to set a reasonable ceiling for fines, so that they in line with the resources available to journalists."

Reporters Without Borders has learned that Sas was released at around 2 p.m. on 3 August. It should be noted that the presidential pardon spared him the sentence but did not quash the conviction.

Journalist serving 150-day jail term for "insulting" Hungarian far-right politician

30 July 2012

Reporters Without Borders condemns the 150-day jail sentence that the Serbian journalist **Laszlo Saš** began serving in Subotica, in northern Serbia on 23 July, a sentence he got for posting an article on the Hungarian-language website *Magyar Szó* in 2007 that allegedly insulted the Hungarian far-right politician László Toroczkai.

"Saš's imprisonment is an aberration," Reporters Without Borders said. "You cannot convict a journalist on a criminal charge just for criticizing a politician. Being criticized is normal. Politicians must learn to accept criticism and to realize it is necessary in a democracy."

"As a candidate to join the European Union, Serbia must protect its journalists and ensure that their freedom to inform and comment is guaranteed. We support the Serbian journalists' associations that are calling for Saš's release and we urge President Tomislav Nikolić to intervene so that he can be amnestied and freed."

Saš is now in Subotica prison serving a sentence for "insulting" a Hungarian politician who was banned from Serbia for almost two years, from 2008 to 2010, because of his ultra-nationalist statements and activities. Toroczkai heads the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (HIVIM), which calls for the unification of ethnic Hungarians living outside Hungary.

The origin of the case is an article that Saš posted online on 24 April 2007 expressing concern about the dangers that Toroczkai's movement pose for Hungary's youth. Toroczkai filed a lawsuit which a municipal court in Subotica began examining on 4 April 2011. It finally ended with the court sentencing Saš to a fine of 150,000 dinars (1,200 euros) on a charge of "insult" under article 170 of the criminal code, and giving him eight months to pay.

Saš appealed to a court in the northern city of Novi Sad, which upheld the sentence on 19 April

of this year. As he could not afford to pay the fine, the sentence was changed to a jail term. He was notified three months later, just before his incarceration.

Serbia is ranked 80th out of 179 countries in the 2011-2012 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

Other images



JPEG - 8.3 kb
170 x 128 pixels
